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ABSTRACT

One way to understand the religion of Islam is to analyze the language and rhetoric of its users and listeners. A study examined the meaning behind the recitation of the 99 metaphorical names of Allah (God), translated from Arabic. Muslim rituals, of which this recitation is one, fulfill the basic principles of metaphors, which imply a framework of values or assume a response to the world. The use of the metaphorical approach for Islam is justified because of its concern with style of expression. The interactions of a religion's adherents and its symbols can be analyzed by rhetorical critics in an effort "to structure the persuader's strategies." The particular strategy employed in this study was to determine if the use of the names of Allah would influence and inform Western receivers. Subjects, 139 American, English-speaking undergraduates from the State University of New York College at Brockport, were given a semantic-differential test to discren if the 99 names were meaningful. The results indicated that most of the names were and thus are possibly useful as a rhetorical tool for informing and persuading. (Six figures and 12 references are appended.) (MS)

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A Study of Muslim Names of Allah as Received by Westerners

by

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S.U.N.Y. at Brockport

The world's peoples have increased awareness of each other as they are drawn closer through available communication by electronic media and the rapid, convenient transportation that makes all corners of the world accessible. The "communication" of media and travel is infused with rapidly occurring events that reverberate and resonate across national boundaries and space making us realize fully the implications of global membership and the pressing need to comprehend our neighbors on this planet.

We have selected an active, exciting area of the world to focus our research on at this time, the Middle East, which seems to be a pivotal area for events to occur and originate from or whose interests are injected into events removed from the area geographically. And, what is the most potent force in the Middle East... The religion of Islam that unites many countries across borders and languages and is integrated into politics and economics. Countries that have large Muslim populations such as Pakistan, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and areas such as Malaysia, Indonesia, and Africa, make conscious efforts to desecularize their countries by

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Islamization: the transposing of the religion of Islam from the Mosque to a national "way" based on Qu'ran doctrine that shapes the economy, education, jurisprudence, and international relations to make them one with the religion of Islam.

We believe that a way to begin to understand a religion and its adherents is to identify its practices and rituals and by applying a communication analysis of the language and rhetoric used and its effect on listeners. When the religion of Islam is understood by its expression and signification we can gain insights into Muslim countries governance, infrastructure, and international relations.

An approach we are using to understand Islam is the examination and analysis of a particular language use because language and culture are one and understanding language use provides insights into culture. One form of ritualized language used by Muslims in worship is the SUBHA or rosary of ninety-nine beads of which each bead is an alternate, metaphorical, name of Allah. As the beads are fingered, the Muslim quietly and reverently repeats the ninety-nine names of Allah. They are called traditionally the "Ninety-nine Beautiful Names of Allah." The list of names varies slightly in different places and times so we have combined three sources of the list of the names closely resembling each other except for one or two instances. (Stade, Jeffrey Arnold)

The names are translations from the Arabic. They first appear in the text of the Qu'ran as the uncreated words of Allah. The translations are efforts to try to render meaning from a foreign culture's language an idiom laden with values. In this study, interpretation was done with good intentions using sympathetic and understanding sources, but we must admit there is possible a lack of force and power of the original language.

Our test subjects were not of the culture or introduced to the divine word so they may have failed to taste the names' sweetness or sense that they were being helped towards a tryst with destiny as the believers experience. These shortcomings are to be expected of westerners when receiving the metaphorical names of Allah.

The reciting of the names is an expression of faith that is standardized and observable as a ritual providing planned moments of a religious process of discovery and discipline, (Denny, p. 64) of losing oneself in a fluid architecture of form and motion of which one is a significant part. The beads provide magic, mysticism, and miracles of spiritualism of the infinite being of Allah. The naming of the beads organizes and defines reality linguistically into intelligible forms that shape the believer's behavior and directs thoughts and feelings of expression.

Rituals and practices are serious aspects of religion because they bring order, provide a tension, movement, solemnity, rhythm, and rapture. All factors that bring forth human involvement, motivation, and sensation. The Muslim ritual dips deep into the well of Islamic tradition as it is traced from Allah in the Qu'ran, the prophet Muhammad, the Angel Gabriel, the Hadith from the sayings and actions of Muhammad, registered in the Isnads, to the Figh, jurisprudence. The rituals and practices are intense expressions using vivid symbols made with dramatic associations, stirring emotions and passions. They are symbolically dense, maybe complicated, and draw participants along a continuum of expanding consciousness to shape perceptions and reaffirm religious, community membership.

The rituals and practices are rhetorical because through linguistic processes they reflect the accepted values and norms, unite people, give a

continuity to culture by the process of shared metaphors. There are three basic principles of metaphors according to Hastings (p.193):

1. A metaphor implies a framework of interrelated perceptions, beliefs, values and actions.
2. ...a metaphor has underlying assumptions about how one is to respond to the world or know the world.
3. The strength of a metaphor depends on
   a) how well it fits the situation
   b) how well the situation fits it
   c) how well it satisfies values, needs, and goals.

Osborn (p. 383) identifies the dramatic significance of metaphors' figurativeness over the literalness. He says that metaphors move audiences, make ideas memorable, enhance, enliven, stimulate senses for mental activity and bodily action, and may even simplify the complex. Hastings (p. 194) states how metaphors can be persuasive to influence beliefs, develop a new reality, make manifest a point of view, and lead to action. Metaphor use prevents a passiveness of those it is directed at because initially there is a tension or excitement in the puzzlement of interpreting then pleasure with discovery in comprehension, and finally satisfaction as the stimulus elicits a new response of insight, (into faith). As the metaphors of Islamic rhetoric in the reciting of the names of Allah are researched, archetypal metaphors are revealed as opportunities for receivers to become involved and participate for religious content adapted to be understood so the receivers are affirming their faith of Islam with its ideals approved, respected and honored.

There is further justification in the metaphorical approach because Islam has been concerned with style of expression. Style was codified in the El Balagha for attaining eloquence, making lucid ideas with representation style using similies, metaphors, and metonymies...devices of rhetoric. (Encyclopedia of Islam p.612).

The metaphor forms that appear in the Ninety-nine Names of Allah include the following, one example is given for each) (Metaphor labels from Baird) (p.417)

1. Prosoppoeia-to express emotion of living in an inanimate thing-"The Light"
2. Enantrosis-Contrary ideas compared to enhance each other-"The Advancer", "The Retarder"
3. Epanorthosis Retract or recall what was said-"The Evident","The Hidden"
4. Allusions-Shared cultural heritage-"The Justly Proud"
5. Catachresis-Name of one thing used for another-"The Advocate" (Verb/Noun)
6. Autonomasia-Proper name for a common name-"The Faithful"
7. Synedoche-Name of a part for the whole- 99 names(parts) of the whole
8. Metonymy-Name replaces another- 99 names(parts) for the whole.
9. Periphrasis-To give variety and eloquence- 99 names

The social order of religion is made whole and exists because of frequent and intense enactments by its members of its symbols. This occurs because of the symbolic nature of man to create reality and communicate about it. The naming of the beads organizes and defines reality linguistically into intelligible forms that shape the believers' behavior and directs how thought and feelings are to be expressed.

We adhere strongly to Burke's thesis that by analyzing a (persuader's) language, which is behavior, a rhetorical critic may be able to reveal the substance of the attempts at identification and thereby to structure the persuader's strategies. The Ninety-nine Names persuasively shape the perception by ritual affirmation of community membership. Symbol making and symbol using humans, shape and create a reality, a behavior. And, when symbolic forms are used, influence is present because motives are inherent in communication.

So we come to the question of Western receivers reactions to the names. If these names are used by Muslims when communicating with westerners in the media: television, newspapers, magazines, books, or in interpersonal encounters, will they influence and inform the receivers? Does the image or idea created in the westerner's mind approximate the image or idea that was intended or desired?

In an attempt to answer these questions a semantic-differential test was used to evaluate each of the 99 Names. The semantic differential is an empirical procedure for assessing the perceived meaning of a concept by having individuals rate the concept on a 7-point continuum between two polar extremes. An example (used in the present study) appears as follows:

good_____:_____:_____:_____:_____:_____:_____bad

Each individual is instructed to check that position on the scale which best represents the direction and intensity of his judgment. In the following study, the 99 Names were rated on 5 separate scales: weak/strong, competitive/cooperative, good/bad, regressive/progressive, and masculine/feminine. The results of the ratings provide insight into the connotations inspired by the names Muslims use to identify and describe their God.

THE METHOD

Subjects: A sample of 139 American, English-speaking subjects who had English as their first language was from undergraduate classes in psychology and communication at the State University of New York College at Brockport. The sample consisted of 80 females and 59 males, with the majority (78%) between the ages of 18 and 24.

Stimulus Materials: Each of the 99 Names was printed at the top of a single page with the five scales presented below. Each page also contained instructions for the subject to check a designated box if the Name was "meaningless" and to proceed to the next page. The 99 pages were then separated into three booklets of 33 pages (Names) each. A cover page was added to each booklet and 50 copies of each of the three booklets were prepared.

Procedure: Subjects were tested in groups (classes) of 30 to 70 students. Standardized instructions were read to the group describing the nature of the semantic-differential task and describing the items to be rated as "titles that might be given to an individual." Subjects were not informed that the items being rated were the 99 Names of Allah. A random assortment of the three different booklets was distributed within each group. Each individual subject completed one booklet of 33 Names in an average time of 10 to 15 minutes.

Results:

Although the English translations of the 99 Names resulted in some unusual or archaic terms, the data indicate that most of the subjects found the names meaningful and had no difficulty with the semantic-differential rating task. The five notable exceptions to this trend are as follows:

Name	Percent Who Checked "Meaningless"
Abaser	89%
Numberer	49%
Sublime	44%
Forebearing	42%
Exalted	39%

Figures 1-5 show the distribution of average ratings of the 99 Names for each of the five rating scales. With a rating of 4 (3.50 to 4.50) representing the neutral point on the scale, the data suggest that the 99 Names have generally positive connotations for American college students: 96 were rated neutral-to-strong, 85 rated neutral-to-cooperative, 92 rated neutral-to-good, and 91 rated neutral-to-progressive. The exceptions to this trend are straightforward and predictable with terms like The Distresser, The Retarder, The Death-Giver, and The Hidden receiving ratings of "regressive," "competitive," and "bad."

Figure 5 suggests that the vast majority of the 99 Names are not perceived as having any gender stereotype with 67 rated neutral, 24 rated masculine, and only 8 rated feminine.

The data showed several instances of statistically significant differences between the ratings given by males versus females. Most of these sex differences involved generally positive terms that were judged to be strongly "masculine" by males but were viewed as neutral or only slightly masculine by females. Terms such as Self-Sufficient, Maker, Provider, Great One, Well-Informed, Wise, Strong, Overcomer, and Provider were all rated significantly more masculine by the males than by the female subjects. On

the "strong/weak" dimension, female subjects tended to give "stronger" ratings to terms such as The "Fashioner," "Merciful," "Peace," "Pardoner," and "Forgiver." The other scales showed very few sex differences and no consistent patterns.

The interpretation of our result's rhetoric can be extended by noting the standardized alternative responses for the polar terms we used given by Osgood in his book, The Measurement of Meaning. These are standardized, functionally equivalent metaphors found in interrelated clusters. For example, when test subjects react to"good", the term has semantic parallels with "beneficial," safe," and "superior" while "bad" is "harmful," dangerous", and "inferior."

Two other sets of polar terms we used each have six metaphorical pairs of contrasting terms. Osgood says that these clusters are parallel and extend meanings. For "competitive and "cooperative" the terms "belligerent/peaceful," contrary/ agreeable," vindictive/conciliatory," "obstructive/helpful", "destructive/productive" obtain. For "progressive/regressive" "increasing/decreasing", "approach/receding," "progressive/ degenerative," "restoring/relapsing", "attracting/repelling", "pursuing/avoiding" are clusters around the original metaphors and can be activated by the original ones used. As Hastings said,"A metaphor implies a framework of interrelated perceptions."

To conclude, our 139 American undergraduates, using the semantic differential with the five scales:

weak--strong

competitive--cooperative

good--bad

regressive--progressive

masculine--feminine

or

meaningless

for the 99 metaphorical names of Allah, while not knowing they were names from the Qu'ran, were able to react, evaluate, and judge the names except for the five names mentioned earlier.

The 99 Names generally have averages with positive connotations; a few were negative names for westerners: "distresser," "death-giver," "hidden." Males and females showed differences by more males assuming that "maker," "great one," "wise" tended to be masculine. There were many names in the neutral area with a tendency towards femininity.

We cannot measure the impact of the metaphorical metonymy of the names, but we can say they were meaningful enough for western receivers to react, evaluate, and judge. Since these names were received and evaluated they become rhetorical to inform and maybe persuade.

We can say that the 99 names of Allah when used with western receivers in media or interpersonal encounters can be expected to be meaningful messages. The images or ideas stirred up in the western receiver's decoding efforts tend to be positive ones.

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Figure 1

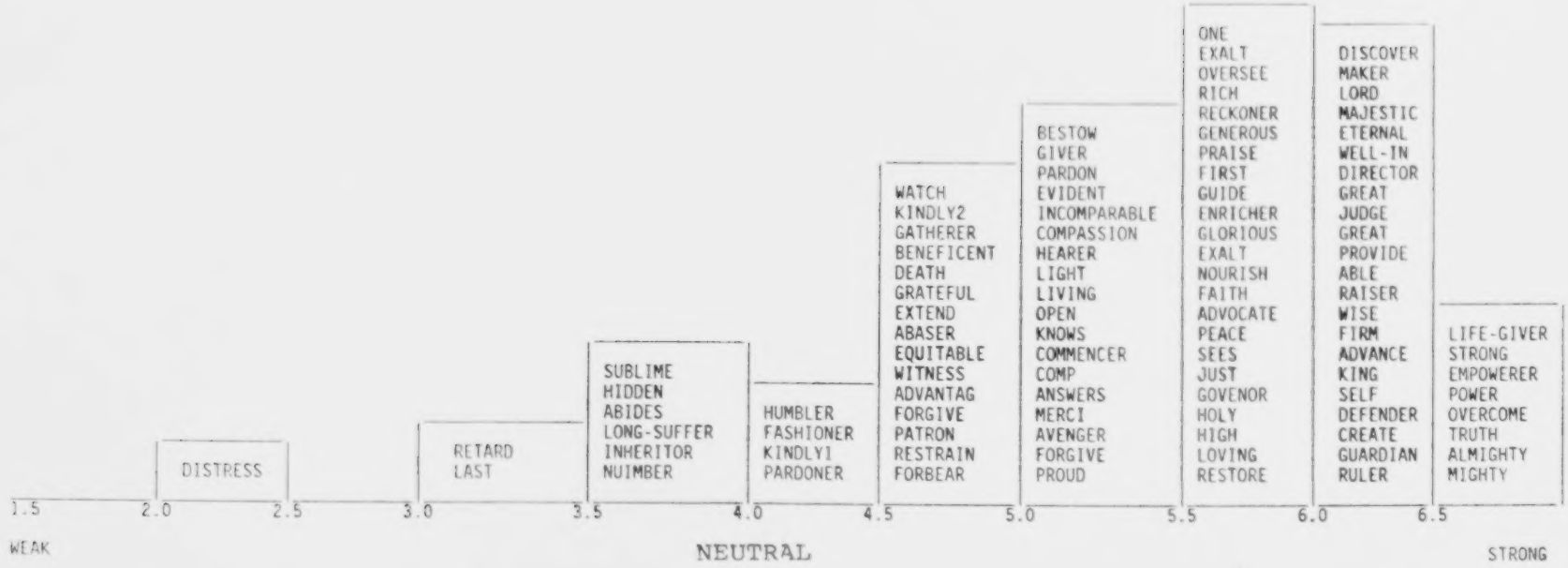
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Figure 2

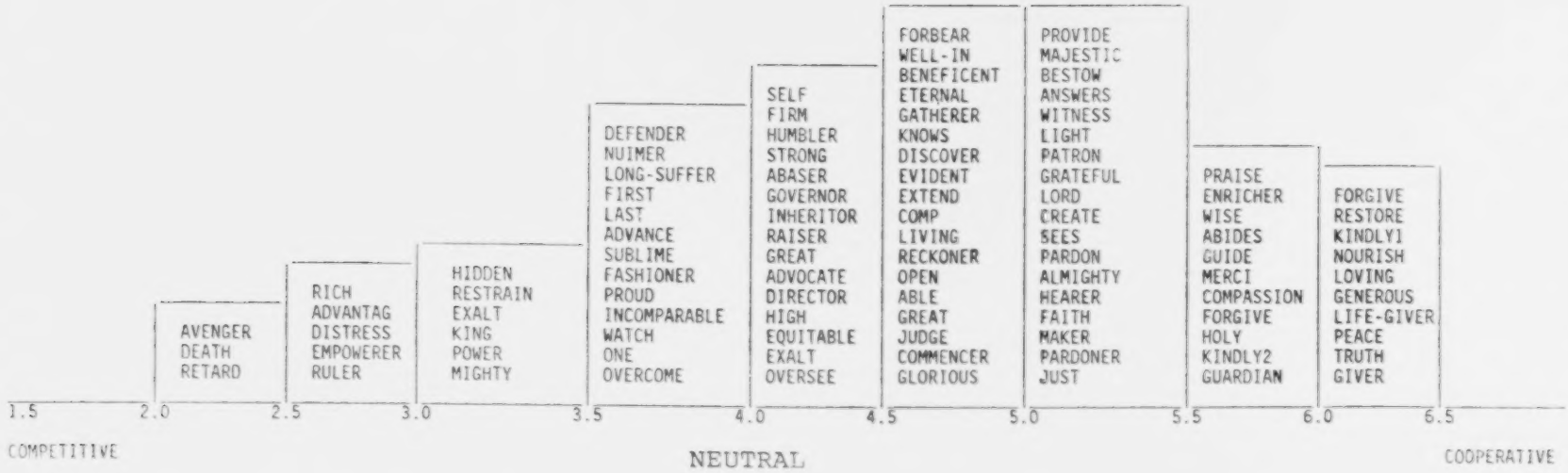
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Figure 3

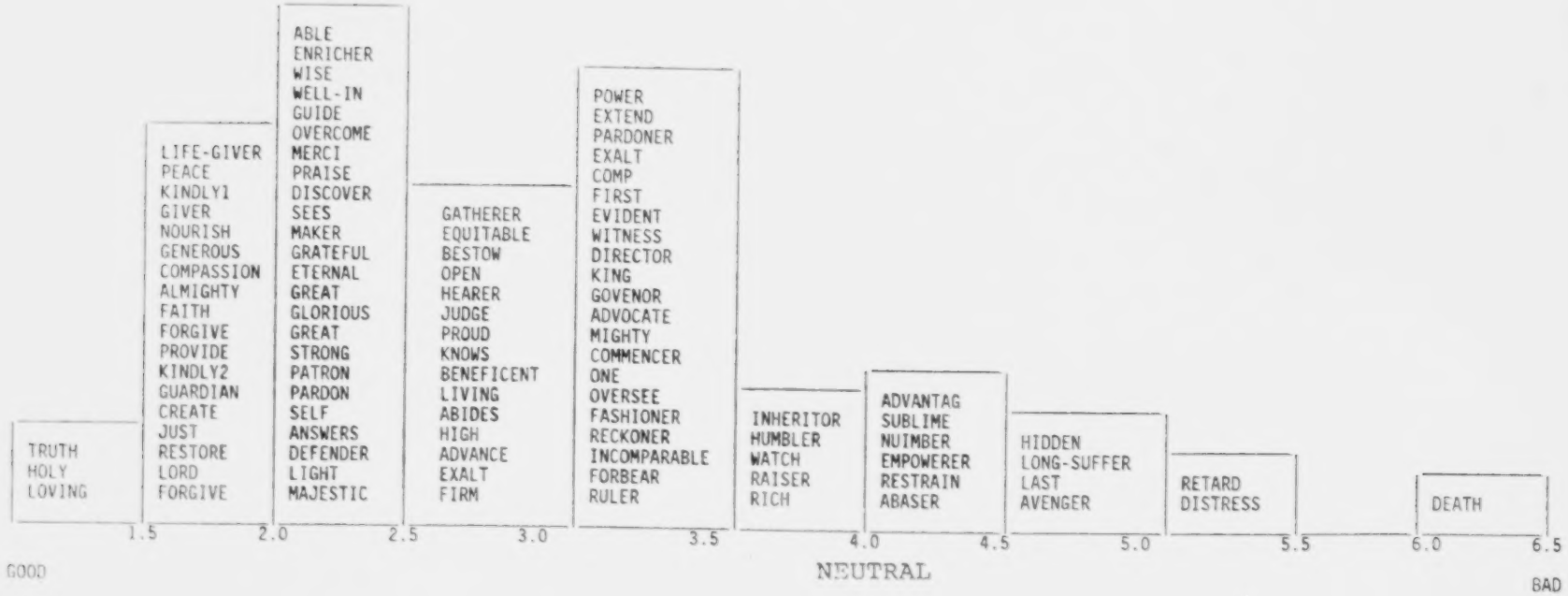
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Figure 4

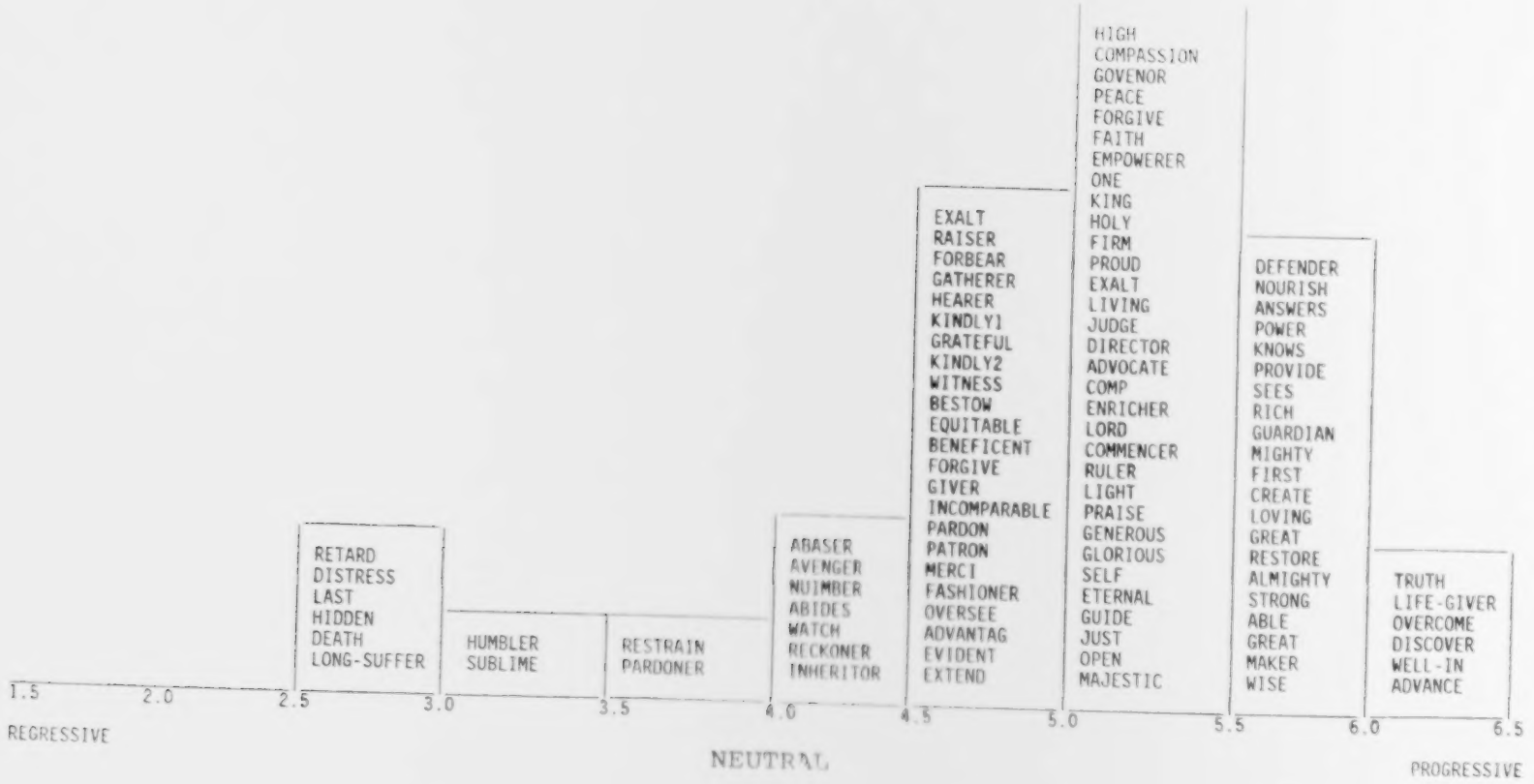
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Figure 5

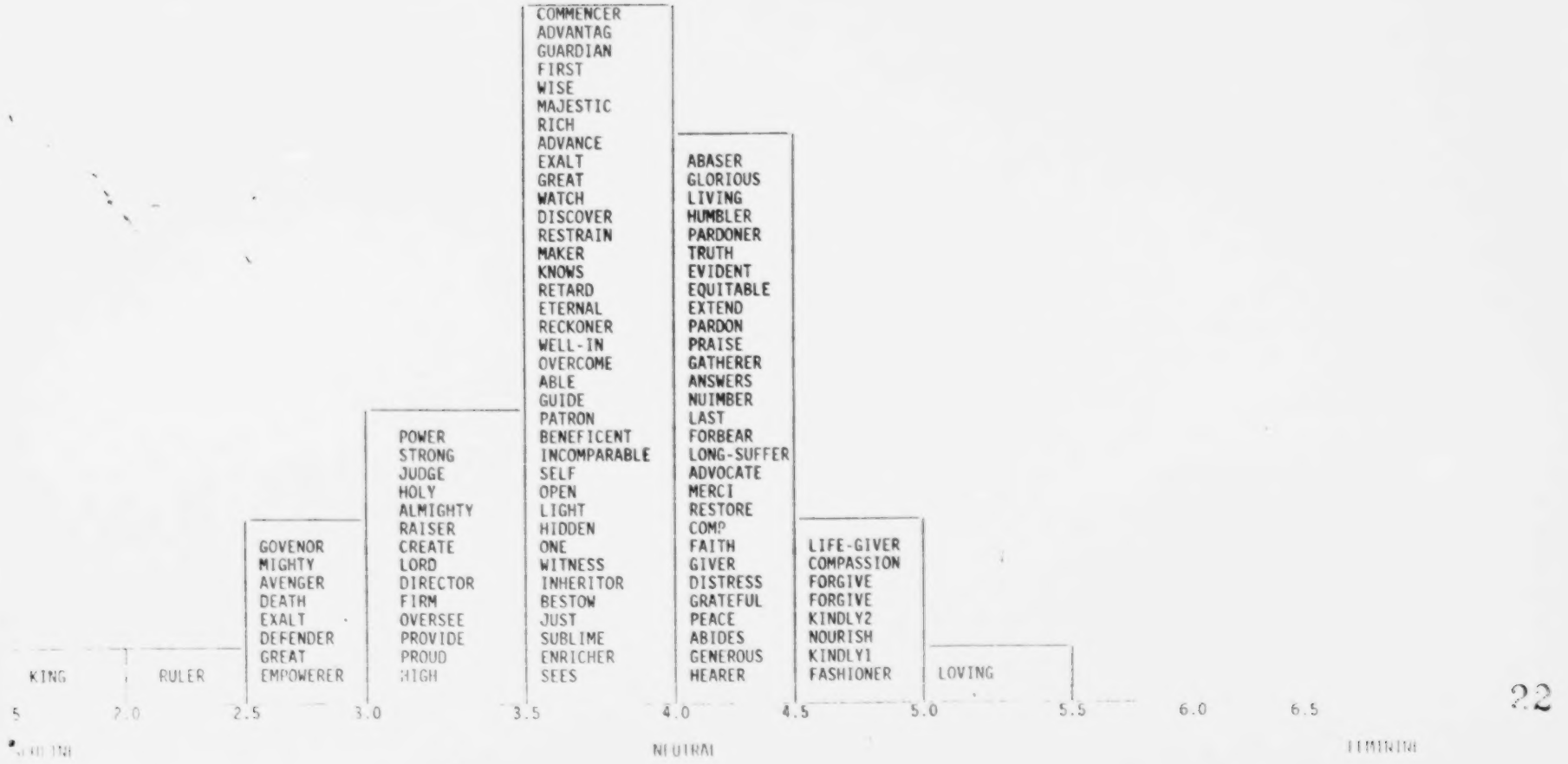
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Figure 6

The Names of Allah from Jeffrey, A. A Reader on Islam. New York: Arno Press, 1980. pp.553-555.

the Merciful One
the Compassionate
the King
the Holy one
the Peace
the Faithful
the Overseer
the Mighty
the Almighty
the justly Proud
the Creator
the Maker
the Fashioner
the Pardoner
the Overcomer
the Bestower
the Provider
the Opener
He who Knows
the Restrainer
the Extender
the Humbler
the Exalter
the Empowerer
the Abaser
the Hearer
He who sees
the Judge
the Just
the Kindly One
the Well-informed
the Forbearing
the Grateful
the Forgiving

the High One
He who is great
the Guardian
the Nourisher
the Reckoner
the Majestic
the Generous
the Watcher
He who answers
the Comprehensive
the Wise
the Loving One
the Glorious
the Raiser(of the dead)
the Witness
the Truth
the Advocate
He who is strong
He who is firm
the Patron
the Praiseworthy
the Numberer
the Commencer
the Restorer
the Life-giver
the Death-giver
the Living One
the Self-subsistent
the Discoverer
the Sublime
the One
the Eternal
the Powerful
the Great one

He who is able
the Advancer
the Retarder
the First
the Last
the Evident
the Hidden
the Governor
the Exalted
the Beneficient
the Forgiver
the Avenger
He who pardons
the Kindly one
Ruler of the Kingdom
Lord of Majesty and Generosity
the Equitable
the Gatherer
the Rich One
the Enricher
the Giver
the Defender
the Distresser
the Advantager
the Light
the Guide
the Incomparable
He who abides
the Inheritor
the Director
the Long-suffering